MY FEELINGS AND FRUSTRATIONS
AS A
HELP CHAPLAIN

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INTRODUCTION

I will present many of the crisis problems of soldiers and their dependents at Fort Carson, Colorado, during my year as "HELP Chaplain" at the Army Community Service Center. I will endeavor to show some of the causes for the problems and how they were handled; to explain the role of the Chaplain as I see it and its relationship to the crisis environment and the helping community.

I

WHAT IS A HELP CHAPLAIN?

Many of the needs of the soldier were not being met at Fort Carson in the last part of 1970 and the first part of 1971. This was attested to by the many conflicts on post, high rate of AWOL's, Article 15, and other family problems.

In order for the community at Fort Carson, Colorado to put into action their concern for the welfare of the soldier and his family, a HELP office was established. By dialing HELP on the phone, answers or guidance could be obtained from trained personnel who worked 24 hours a day. While the Inspector General's Office was tasked with the overall supervision, it was located in the Army Community Service Center utilizing all agencies located in there. The chaplain, social workers, budget counselors, Army Emergency Relief, Red Cross, Equal Opportunity Officer, Mental Hygiene, Judge Advocate, Military Police and the Adjutant General's Office working together could provide the soldier the resources and support to solve most of his problems. Personnel trained in crisis intervention, knowledgeable of the resources of the community, the policies and procedures of the post, gave instant relief to the anxieties of the soldier and his dependents. They recorded all requests for assistance from consumer complaints, mistreatment, drug problems and family problems. Their problems

received immediate attention by a dedicated staff. Signs were posted all over the post, stickers placed on the phones and announcements made to all troops: If you have a question, complaint or need assistance of any kind, dial HELP.

I was asked to help out in this area of concern. I rejected the idea of the chaplain answering the phone since only two calls out of ten required the chaplain. An office was established in the Army Community Service Center where I could coordinate the chaplain's activities and provide immediate assistance in matters of religion, morals and morale. Naturally since I was connected with the HELP office, I became known as "the HELP Chaplain." This is really a misnomer, it should have been "HOPE Chaplain." I viewed my ministry as one of caring and sharing with those who were facing crisis situations, which contributed greatly to their mental health and spiritual growth. Their attitude of apathy, depression, loss of identity and powerlessness against the green machine prevails as they ask, "Is there any hope?" The pastor in his unique role can help his people to rediscover the ultimate meaning and purpose of life in the midst of tragedy.

II

WHAT IS A CRISIS?

Crisis is generally defined as a turning point or transition,[1] and involves theories of action rather than some theory of knowledge. There are two types of crisis, the first is developmental. They are universal experiences, generally termed developmental, maturational or situational crises common in the life cycle of the individual and his family. The first of the crucial transitions is birth, followed by name giving and baptism, confirmation is another rite in the chain of developmental crisis. Marriage follows next in the life and status of the individual with death being the last great transition ceremony, critical of the family as well as the individual. Crises of this type depend heavily on social mores and social customs for working them out. The family as a system is a coping mechanism of paramount importance in experiencing and resolving these developmental crises.

Each of Erickson's[2] developmental stages is a crisis in the sense of connoting a turning point rather than a threat of catastrophe. If all goes well, the infant acquires trust, proceeds to autonomy, and then continues to initiative. The school child develops a wish to make things, a sense of industry. Adolescence presents the identity crisis which,

[1]Howard J. Clinebell, Jr., Basic Types of Pastoral Counseling (New York: Abington Press, 1966). p. 160.

[2]Erik H. Erikson, Childhood and Society (New York: Morton Co., 1963). pp. 247-284.

if successfully mastered, leads to the experience of intimacy. The adult concerned with bringing up the young enters the stage of generativity. As old age comes upon him, he may finally achieve integrity. Each of these stages has its negative counterpart: mistrust, shame, guilt, inferiority, identity, confusion, isolation, and despair.

If these experiences are handled expeditiously, the outcome for the person is continued maturation and enhancement of his development. If the stress inherent in the crisis is not handled adequately, it may play a determining role in shaping a new conflict.

The second type of crisis could be termed conincidental, accidental or environmental. They are the critical events that occur in our lives, always expected but unpredictable, and constitute a real crisis if we are unable to endure them. They include accidental injuries, natural disasters, physical and mental illness, loss of job, status, geographic relocation, income, suicide, life-threatening experiences and others that induce a sudden change in the customary life style of the individual.

Most people expect life to be as easy as driving down the freeway, but our statistics indicate it is more like a mountain trail and a washed valley road. All of these crisis have certain psychodynamic traits in common. There is anxiety, both psychic and that which is reflected in somatic-tension states.[3] These are witnessed in the life style of the soldier and his coping mechanisms. It is important to determine whether the more troublesome symptom comes from the crisis itself or are the consequences of a

[3]Howard P. Rome, "Crisis Intervention," Psychiatry, The Clergy and Pastoral Counseling, ed. by Dana L. Farnsworth and Francis J. Braceland, (Collegeville, Minnesota: Institute for Mental Health, St. John's University Press, 1969). p. 83.

poor way of dealing with it. Different strokes are required for different folks.

While the crisis situation is a time of pain and stress, it is also a critical time for the helping community to assist the individual to cope with the situation in a healthy way. This is especially so in the military community. I am convinced that for every hour spent at crisis counseling, you will eliminate the need for nine hours later on.[4]

[4]Homer L. Jernigan, Pastoral Care and the Crises of Life, ed. Howard J. Clinebell, Jr., Community Mental Health, (New York: Abington Press, 1970). p. 59.

III

THE CRISIS ENVIRONMENT

The military community is fertile ground for all types of crisis situations. During the first year's operation 4,993 calls were logged by the HELP Office. They were classified as follows:

1.	Pay, allowances, support	504
2.	Assignment	114
3.	Discharge, separation, ret.	138
4.	Privileges	54
5.	Harassment, bias, discrim.	138
6.	Medical	164
7.	Disciplinary	123
8.	Administration	78
9.	Post Facilities	921
10.	AWOL	11
11.	Drugs	44
12.	Family/marital	160
13.	Personal	239
14.	Religious	69
15.	Suicidal	20
16.	Emotional	24
17.	General info. calls	1,542
18.	Prank	32
19.	Consumer relations	416
20.	Other	402

The HELP Chaplain during the same period recorded 2,786 cases in the following areas:

1.	Financial	63
2.	Food	443
3.	Admin. (discipline, hardship)	338
4.	Personal counseling	93
5.	AWOL	41
6.	Referrals	882
7.	Clothing, furniture & housing	319
8.	Marital problems	206

9.	Religious	302
10.	Suicide	14
11.	Misc. (includes transportation)	145

Most of these crisis situations were the result of the soldier's or his dependent's inability to cope with the situation. Many times the soldier was helpless to do anything.

The basic problem was that of socialization. In the past when any crisis came, he could receive some support from his family, peers and reference groups if he did not know where or how to solve the problem. Different cultures provided different ways to cope with the situation. Within the military most of the draftees are relocated far from their families and culture groups. They are not familiar with the services that the community has available, and their only source of contact is the sergeant who represents the authority that put them into the situation. Not only that, he more than likely would be from a different culture and would not understand the situation. The problem is compounded when the soldier is married and has a family. What does his wife do for friends and peer groups?

Add to this the problems of economics. During the fiscal year 31 March 1971--1 April 1972, the soldier's pay doubled, however he had to pay for the moving and travel expense of his family. Many times the soldier had to pay more for rent than he earned. Food stamps were used by a large number of the lower ranking soldiers with families. Credit was just not available for them unless co-signed by a ranking NCO or officer. Telephones were required when you lived off post and this generally required a $50 deposit. Many of the families lived in unfurnished buildings with little or no furniture. During

this period of time FInance was reworking its system of pay resulting in overpay and others receiving nothing for several months.

The psychological implications are many. Consider the young married soldier who was making $1300 a month before he came into the service. His starting salary in December 1970 for his military work was $186 plus $40 more for his wife. It is no wonder he can not satisfy his company commander's requirements or his wife's desires because he really has not decided who he is. Once you see the depressed soldier experience a conversion, simply because you provide him with a baby bed, you begin to feel the importance of little things (in our eyes) to those around us. This young soldier saw himself as a failure as a man, father and husband because he could provide only a cardboard box for his infant son. The young wife who came seeking help, not charity, was released from all her tension when the counselor saw the light and helped her find a job. The object may differ with each individual but the effects on the individual and his community are dangerous.

What about the problem of the institution? The Army is big; while it says it takes care of its own people, there seems to be a contradiction when it deals with the lower end of the rank structure. This is not so much the fault of the institution as it is of the interpretation put upon orders and directives by individuals within the institution. When a commanding officer decides a problem shall go no further, it becomes difficult to see justice and be able to survive the consequences. Many times I have felt helpless against the institution and yet I realized I was not positioned near the bottom.

There are many different ways soldiers respond to the crisis they face. Some will deny a problem exists, especially if he asks for confirmation by his sergeant. Others will evade the problem by turning to drugs or alcohol. Many will not seek or accept help from others, seeing it as a weakness on their part. Others are unable to express or master negative feelings. The most common way of dealing with the crisis problems within the Army is projection on to others of the total responsibility for causing and curing the crisis. While others fail to explore the nature of the crisis or alternative solutions to it many will turn away from friends and family too. The minister's image and identity give him the most favored position to help in crisis situations.

IV

THE WORKING SITUATION AT FORT CARSON

The Army Community Service Center at Fort Carson was, in my opinion, one of the few places where all the helping professions worked together to help the soldier. No person left that building a stranger. There were no problems too large or too small to handle. The staff and volunteers were the most dedicated people with whom I have had the experience to work. While the HELP phone received most of the urgent cries for help, newcomers were welcomed and familiarized with the services available and others were referred to the ACS for assistance.

The call for help placed me in the role of supportive counselor. Food assistance was a common problem faced by most of the young married soldiers. The Chaplain's Fund had always been used for this through special designated offerings and gifts from the women's organizations on post. Not only was food provided but the soldier and his wife were introduced to the friendly budget counselor next door. As a professional in the field of finance he could help the family live within their means and manage their income more efficiently. If the real source of trouble was not money but a family problem, he would take them next door to the marriage counselor. Food was given only as an emergency measure after all other means of

helping them solve their problems had been explored. Army Emergency Relief, American Red Cross, partial pay, food stamps, were other alternatives depending upon the individual situation..

Financial problems as listed in the statistical list referred to those problems involving pay. No pay resulting from over-pay, over-draw, and AWOL created a real hardship on some families. The soldier is a responsible individual and if he chooses to abuse his privilege, advance pay for example, then he will have to suffer the consequences. Many situations arise where the individual has no control over them but satisfactory arrangements could be made to alleviate the hardship when the situation was explained to the man in charge.

Many times the counselor, myself or an assistant, acted as a parent to help support the individual while he worked out some of the problems of the past. Someone that cared and was concerned enough to listen and suggest alternative ways of coping with the problems relieved the tensions in many cases.

One of the hardest problems for me in dealing with crisis situations at first, was to be patient and listen to the soldier. Since I had all the resources at hand to solve any problem, it was difficult to be still and accept all the hostility and anger without being threatened. Many times after the soldier had ventilated for some time, the paralyzing tensions which inhibited his good judgment were reduced to where he could solve his own problems. This was particularly true in personal counseling, administrative, hardship, and compassionate review. Just the fact that someone in authority showed some kind concern for their feelings gave them the necessary strength to cope.

By far one of the largest areas of crisis counseling was the referral category. Once I could see the crisis confronting the individual from his point of reference, he was informed that he would be referred to the one who could help him with the problem. Within the ACSC there was a team effort to help the soldier. Rapport was established with the soldier, concern for his situation was evident, and if he was not satisfied with the results of the referral, he could return. There were no problems of referal within the building; sometimes there was a reluctance to be referred to mental hygiene, however most of this could be resolved if considered ahead of time.

On all referrals to other agencies outside the building, we informed the agency of the referral and asked to be informed of the action taken. We made it the responsibility of the individual to call and make the appointment. Where needed, transportation was supplied for dependents to receive help from other sources. A trained chaplain who is familiar with all the resources of the post and the local community can give objectivity to the crisis problem in a way that no other person can do. He looks at it in the perspective of a life style and not as just an instant.

AWOL's were a real challenge for me. I respected the parishes on post and the only soldiers I counseled for AWOL were the ones that wanted to turn themselves in or referred to me by a unit chaplain. To accept the soldier, in spite of all he had done, to stand by him until he is able to work out his problem is a real test of patience.

Many times the environment had to be changed in order to eliminate some of the stress. This was true in the situation of clothing, housing and furniture. The need was so great for some means of providing furniture to the

soldier in the lower ranks so he could secure government subsidized housing, we initiated paperwork which eventually saw surplus property being used. This became part of ACSC and was meeting the needs of 186 families at the end of the first year. Changes can be made in the institution if you are willing to take the risk. I see my job as being facilitator not the director, as being flexible and able to meet the needs of those in crisis situations.

Suicide calls are never to be taken lightly.[5] Action oriented therapy seems to give some structure and meaning to a life in need of hope. Talking about the situation is one means of dealing with it providing the counselor is freed from his own anxieties about death.

There are times when only religious resources will meet the needs of some soldiers. Scriptures and prayer constitute a valuable supportive role which nothing else can do. The problems of sin and guilt can only be relieved in the context of the religious faith and what it means to the individual. Many of the marriage problems involve some aspect of religious commitment. Marriage problems involving legal implications, welfare assistance, or abuse of children, deep psychiatric problems were referred to the Social Worker or Marriage Counselor. There were marriage counseling groups and other chaplains dealing with specific areas available on post. Most of the situations I became involved with were ones unassigned to units or in crisis situations (the wife with a knife in her hand or husband in bed with another soldier's wife).

[5]Dana L. Farnsworth, "Suicide," Psychiatry, The Clergy and Pastoral Counseling, ed by Dana L. Farnsworth and Francis J. Braceland, (Collegeville , Minnesota: Institute for Mental Health, St. John's University Press, 1969). p.211.

V

MY FEELINGS

This was one of the most emotionally draining positions I have ever fulfilled in my life. The continuous hours of counseling and activity were a real burden at times. Since most of the personnel at the Community Service Center wore civilian clothes I elected to wear clerics. Someone gave me a big smily-face button upon which the sergeant printed, "God Loves You ." This became part of the job, it reflected my feelings about the job. It was the most rewarding experience of my ministry, to see human beings from every walk of life confronted with impossible situations, struggle and fight to overcome them, and brought joy to my heart; not that they all succeeded but even if only one is saved, it is worth all the effort.

I have served in several churches but they never expressed as much caring for human beings as I witnessed at Fort Carson. Two very fine young men assisted me at the HELP Office. Sometimes their hair got a little long but it never exceeded their dedication and devotion to helping their fellowmen. I often remember the two girls who sang Christmas carols in the housing area and afterwards brought $21.42 to my office as a gift for some needy family.

The community needs a prophet to make known the needs, a priest to conduct services of worship and a pastor who

feels the needs of his people because he is with them. A chaplain working together with others can find a full and rewarding ministry within the community setup.

VI

MY FRUSTRATIONS

Any type of job or position with a structured institution which is new will create distrust and dissension. I was disillusioned; I felt it could not happen in the fellowship of believers. Few chaplains would voice their objections to this type of ministry but there are other subtle ways of doing it. Chaplain's Funds were provided for commissary purchases of food but the assistant would have to go to the fund clerk or the fund custodian to secure the money and take the individual to the commissary. This five minute job usually involved several trips and many hours to accomplish. When it was suggested that there was a need for religious services in a housing area, no one was available even though only about half of the chaplains had a pulpit on the post. More than once I was told my career was in jeopardy if I insisted on helping the soldier or dependent who was being misused. My assistants received Army Commendation Medals when they left post but I was innovative and threatened the status quo. Innovation is satisfactory to meet the needs but do not expect to win approval from false shepherds.

VII

CONCLUSION

There is a tremendous need at most Army installations to have some place where the soldier and his dependents can turn to find a substitute for his family, peers, reference groups and minister. The Army Community Service Center program as experienced at Fort Carson can provide this substitute. Here all the helping agencies located together can meet the needs of the whole person, they can help him in crisis situations and strengthen him for the times ahead. Continual guidance and support can be given through small groups dealing with the problems of inter-personal relations, finance, marriage, and drugs. Role playing, dramatics, lectures, movies, and various social workshops could be utilized for continual involvement in transforming the society into a community of concerned people, responsible for their every action

Only in the context of a forgiving and forgiven community can we experience God's love and create an atmosphere for mental and spiritual growth. How the community deals with the crisis situations of its people will determine the need for hospitals and corrective institutions. Every human being is different but requires the same supportive help regardless of the crisis and needs to see some hope for a brighter life.

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